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Courageous Thankfulness.

COURAGEOUS THANKFULNESS.

TWENTIETH
PASTORAL ANNIVERSARY,

JULY 4, 1869,

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Complimentary
J. GEO. BUTLER.

WASHINGTON, D. C.:
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CORRESPONDENCE.

WASHINGTON, *July 5, 1869.*

Rev. J. GEO. BUTLER, D. D.,

DEAR SIR: The undersigned, constituting the Vestry of St. Paul's English Lutheran Church of this city, agreeably to the request made by the congregation at the close of your discourse, delivered on the twentieth anniversary of your Pastorate, Sunday, July 4, respectfully ask a copy of the same for publication. In thus complying with the expressed wish of the congregation, allow us to say that we fully and heartily endorse the truths and principles enunciated in your sermon, and believe its publication will tend not only to strengthen our own Zion, but also the whole church militant.

A. S. PRATT,
ANDREW NOERR,
GEO. RYNEAL, Jr.,
J. H. KUEHLING,
S. E. THOMASON.

To A. S. PRATT, Esq., and others,
Vestry St. Paul's Church,

BRETHREN: I have endeavored to reproduce the anniversary discourse, and am glad to place the manuscript at your disposal—ever happy to gratify a devoted people, to whom in the future as in the past, if the will of God be so, I hope, and more earnestly, to consecrate my life.

Appreciating your personal and official love and co-operation in doing the work of the Master,

I am, in the best of bonds,

Your Pastor,
J. GEO. BUTLER.

ST. PAUL'S PARSONAGE, *July 9, 1869.*

SERMON.

Scripture Lessons.—Acts 20: 17-35; 1 Cor. 1: 17-31, and 2: 1-5.

An incident in the life of the great Apostle suggests our anniversary thought. When a prisoner for Christ, on his way to Cæsar's court, at Appii Forum, the brethren from Rome met him, Luke says, (Acts 28: 15,) *he thanked God and took courage.* Past deliverances and present blessings inspired thankfulness, whilst courageously he looked into the future—his Heaven-appointed mission not yet accomplished.

Reviewing a pastorate of twenty years—my entire public ministry—in the presence of the brethren, *have we reason to thank God, and may we courageously address ourselves to the work yet before us?* Has God sanctioned this relation? Is the path of duty plain? Does He inspire the courage necessary for the trying and blessed responsibilities of the future?

We are to study life—our individual life—our life as a church, in their relation to the Gospel and the coming kingdom of Jesus. The Gospel is God's remedial plan. It has application to man's body as well as his soul, reaching every relation in life—God's reconstruction of a world wrecked and ruined

by sin. You and I attain the great mission of life only as we glorify God in our body and spirit, only as we witness for Jesus and further the kingdom that shall never be moved. How much prodigal, wasted life all around us!

“We live in deeds, not years—in thoughts, not breath;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial;—
We should count time by heartthrobs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

It is not my purpose to tell you how many sermons I have preached; how many services rendered; how many missions planted; how much money collected for the furtherance of the Gospel. These are only means to an end. The general may enlist and equip an immense army; he may astonish the world by his grand reviews, but when an enemy is to be subdued and the life of a Government saved, we want to know of hotly-contested fields, of achievements, and onward progress toward final triumph. Has God used us to further the cause of truth and righteousness in this Capital of the nation? Is this one of the golden candlesticks, shedding its heavenly light upon this thick darkness? Is He who holds the stars in His right hand in our midst, owning our agency in the great battle for truth and souls?

We are reminded, in this review, beloved, that our future may be brief. The fathers, where are they? Of those in the communion of this church twenty years ago, not a half dozen will meet us to-day at the table of the Lord. The workman dies, but the work goes on. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them.” And, oh! how many during all these years have rejected Jesus, and hardened themselves in unbelief and worldliness! Whilst many have gone from the worship of this

sanctuary to mingle their praises with the blood-washed, are there none who hopelessly gnash their teeth as they remember a rejected Saviour! He that believeth not shall be damned.

Nor should we suffer ourselves to be discouraged in the work of the Lord, though we see not at once the abundant fruit of our labor. This is a work of faith; one soweth and another reapeth. The artist and sculptor paint and chisel for immortality. The works of the old masters remain, and they live upon the canvas and in the marble. If the growing centuries add lustre to the memory and glory to the work of the Martyr, the Reformer, and the Apostle, though the green sward soon rest upon our bosom, God honors present faithfulness, and coming generations shall call us blessed. We may have passed away ere millennial glory shall bless the world; yet the man who is true to truth, to *self*, to Christ, is God's co-worker, and with the Lord a thousand years are as one day. His reconstructing work is going forward, and the humblest disciple, loyal to manhood, to freedom, to Christ, shall celebrate the glory of Satan's overthrow, and join the coronation of Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

“ The lives of good men all remind us,
We may make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.”

When Paul, amid the idolatry and wealth and refinement of commercial Corinth, preached Jesus, at the cost of persecution, the Lord in vision stood by him to dissipate his fear and nerve his heart, because *He had much people in that city*. Our mission is to *save the Lord's people in this city*. What masses are yet unsaved! The gospel only can save them. It is not my mission only. You—each of you has a message. The Lord

sends you to lead and save souls—a little child it may be, from the soul-destroying influences of a prayerless and Christless home, to the Sabbath school, to the sanctuary, to the cross of Jesus. Did we but feel our individual responsibility, what might we not accomplish for the Master amid the corrupting influences of this great, growing Metropolis. Whatever our discouragements, the Lord bids us not be afraid as we go into the streets and lanes—not to wage war against others of the Lord's sacramental host, but against sin, the world, and the devil.

Has the Lord called us to this work? Does He stand by us, give us His seal, inspire us with the faith and courage needed for the work? Surely I, as an individual, have reason to thank Him that He has graciously spared me during all these years to testify for Jesus. Twenty years filled with responsibility and labor and pastoral care! How shall I meet these privileges and opportunities—all these souls in the judgment? God be merciful to me a sinner!

You who have been graciously called and kept as laborers; kept, amid temptations and the defections of some, honoring the Saviour, in your holy living, you, too, have reason for courageous thankfulness! We, as laborers together, have cause to thank Him *that the church has not died*. It had well nigh died. The indifference of some, the opposition and slander of others, would have destroyed it, but the gates of hell have not prevailed. There are not a few who have assumed a fearful responsibility in turning away from this pulpit, by reason of its loyalty to truth, to freedom, to the great principles of this Holy Word, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. The preaching of the cross, and the labors of God's servants here have not been in vain in the Lord. The church lives in vigor and fruitful-

ness. Our growth has been steady and healthy. Like the Banyan, we have thrown here and there our branches, upon which God is smiling. We who were not a people have become a people, honored of men, acknowledged of God. We thank Him and take courage.

Christian labor is not to be estimated by apparent results. From this great centre, especially, influences are radiating to all parts of our land. Probably in all parts of the world, where Christ is named, are those who have heard the Gospel from this pulpit. Eternity alone will reveal the saving influences—the hidden fountains of Divine blessing flowing through the ordinances and labors of this Church of Christ.

If we ask why this church has grown, and why it has not grown more rapidly, I reply, paradoxical as it may appear, the *preaching* of the *whole Gospel* has, under God, been blest to our increase in numbers, in knowledge, and in grace, I trust, whilst at the same time it has caused others to turn away from this house of God. A *sectional* Gospel might have been acceptable to men. A Gospel of justice and equity and righteousness between man and man—the *whole* counsel of God—which I have not shunned to declare, has been my great sin in this community, and a sin yet remembered. You and I have long enough breathed this atmosphere to know something of the virus which exhales from that monster evil hitherto so potent, spreading its deadly influence through the whole land. During these twenty years I have come to a fuller understanding of that great truth with which I entered this pulpit, determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The Gospel is much more than the simple offer of pardon to sinning men through the cross of Christ. It is the world's regenerator. It is the wisdom and power of God, the light, the fire, the ax, the

sword, as well as the balm—the water, the cleansing blood. It is Heaven's panacea for a world's sorrow. It applies to every relation of life—domestic, social, civil, and ecclesiastical. It tests opinions, customs, laws, and constitutions. It respects only truth and right, whilst it offers and secures the highest well-being of man—in the Divine glory. The ax, here, has been laid to the root of the tree. The influence of this pulpit, feeble it may be, has been thrown on the side of right. We have endeavored to look at man as man—from the hand of the same Creator, redeemed by the same Redeemer, sanctified by the same Holy Spirit, rising above all nationality, recognizing the great brotherhood; knowing no restrictions but such as the Bible prescribes. Men have regarded me their enemy because I have told them the truth. With no asperity, in all patience, I have endeavored meekly to instruct those who oppose themselves, spending and being spent—though the more I love the less I am loved.

During all these trying years, amid great discouragement, I have stood firmly, under the consciousness that we are upon the frontier, fighting the battles of freedom—the^d freedom where-with Christ makes free. No merely local importance attaches to this position. We stand here near the nation's heart, and the influence of the pulpit of this city is felt everywhere throughout the land and through the world. The hope of the Government is in the Gospel; the Gospel that enlightens and liberates and restrains and sanctifies and saves. And the sentiment of the nation, so long dwarfed and distorted by legalized bondage, cannot be purified save by the diffusion of the *whole* Gospel.

Nor have you had a *denominational* Gospel from this pulpit. Representing the largest Protestant denomination in the world,

we are comparatively unknown in this city. Though our history runs back to the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, and comes down to us freighted with the triumphs of precious faith, we are yet scarcely a quarter of a century old in our national capital. Indeed we can scarcely trace our history back farther than twenty years, and we call you to witness that, during all these years, we have exalted only Christ. We represent the *Evangelical* Lutheran Church, our platform broad as the Gospel—fellowshipping all who hold Christ the living head—making no conditions of communion or salvation, save faith in our Lord Jesus—ourselves but one division of the grand army, doing battle only against the enemies of our glorious Leader and King.

In common with all friends of Jesus, we rejoice in the progress of union among the churches. It is time that we should be removing the dividing lines—that we should not only recognize each other as parts of the one great church, of which Jesus is the head—but also seek greater organic union. The questions that gender strife and do not minister to godly edifying should be put away in every man's own conscience, and whereunto we have attained, we should walk by the same rule, studying the things that make for peace, wherewith we may edify one another. But never, beloved, will the prayer of the Great Intercessor that they *all may be one* be fulfilled until we rise to broad evangelical principles. Upon the tenets of sects all can never be one. With diversities among ourselves, we yet have agreement and life and vigor, holding in essentials unity, allowing in non-essentials liberty, and cherishing in all things charity.

This, my brethren, is the broad basis upon which we stand as a church, and this is the Scriptural basis of historic Lutheran-

ism. Upon no other could I, as your pastor, stand—testing all creeds and confessions and opinions and usages by the word of God—claiming for myself, and according to all the friends of Jesus, that fullness of freedom which the Scriptures warrant.

Truth in love has been the simple policy of this pulpit during all these years—truth, as opposed to falsehood and insincerity and guile; for God requires truth in the inward parts, and every liar shall have his portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. The Christian must be a transparent man. Truth, as opposed to error, testing all religions, though venerable with the centuries, by the teachings of Him who is the *Truth!* Truth uttered, not suppressed; boldly preached, not slurred; defended, not compromised—for we are set for the defence of the Gospel. Truth, not in wrath, but in all the tenderness of love—love for the truth and love for the sinner, who can be saved only by the truth.

This pulpit claims to be a *positive* pulpit—of its own opinions diffident and distrustful, itself the servant of all, but in teaching God's word bold, authoritative, uncompromising—watching for souls in view of the final account.

Under influences like these, beloved, we are what we are as a people—ever endeavoring to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

There is a future for us. How long you and I may be actors in the drama, God only knows. We may soon—

“Lay these painful heads
And aching hearts beneath the soil;
May slumber in that dreamless bed
From all our toil.”

“I must work while it is day,” says the Great Worker, and our sun has not yet gone down. We cannot pray until we

work. If God is to bless the labor of our hands our hands must labor. Prayer without work is mockery. The Lord has much people in this city. It is ours to offer them the Gospel, it is God's to save them. Souls are to be gathered; the Gospel is to be sustained; our Missions are to be fostered; our **Memorial* is to be built; and no matter what the industry or faith of a pastor, unsustained by his people, he will sink. As well expect the general alone to execute his well-planned campaigns as a minister of Christ, without the prayerful and helpful sympathy of his people, to carry forward the Lord's work. The indolent, the censorious, the covetous, and the self-seeking are not helpers. You, feeling your individual responsibility and meeting it every day, will make this church a mighty power in the hand of God.

When David with earnest love devoted himself to the building of the Temple, he assembled the princes and all the people, and asked *who is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?* The Lord calls for *service*, not for promises nor professions! God is not mocked. The *I go sirs*, who go not, cannot deceive Him, though they deceive their own souls to ruin. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. The Lord has need of your service—your muscle and your brain—your gold and your labor—your tongue and your pen—your ten talents or your one. There is some niche

* *Your money and prayers* are asked in behalf of the *Memorial Church*—a memorial of *God's goodness in sparing the life of the nation, and a memorial of peace*. It is to be a large *free* church at the nation's capital. Upwards of \$20,000 have already been collected and expended in purchasing ground and erecting the *Memorial Chapel*. From \$50,000 to \$75,000 are yet needed to complete the work. Send contributions to Jay Cooke & Co., Treasurer, or to Rev. J. G. Butler.

for you to fill—some service for you to render—something demanding *consecration*, the honest, earnest, and prayerful devotion of your service to the *Lord*—not to the minister; he, too, is but a fellow-servant. It is your solemn duty and your honorable privilege to devote yourself to the service of your Redeeming Lord—to make some return to Him who bought you with His own blood. You are His, and not your own. He would have you serve Him and save your own soul. He asks a *willing* service. Your *will* only stands in the way of your salvation. Ye *will* not come to me that ye might have life. Your will finds excuse for every neglect of duty. There is a mighty power in *willing* to serve the Lord! Who is willing? And *this day*! The Lord's work is to be done now—to-morrow's sun may shine upon your grave.

“ There is a time, we know not when,
A point, we know not where,
That marks the destiny of man,
To glory or despair.

“ There is a line, by us unseen,
Which crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath.”

From this review, beloved, we should abound with thankfulness that God has at all honored our feeble instrumentality, and address ourselves courageously to the work yet before us—it is God's work.

I earnestly call upon you who are yet in the service of sin to abandon it, and enter to-day upon the Lord's service. Upon you who have but a name to live, who have never addressed yourselves earnestly to the work of the Lord; upon you who have turned away from the truth, who have grown lukewarm

and cold, I call upon you to consecrate yourselves heartily to-day to the service of the Lord. If in aught we have sinned against each other—and what man is there who sinneth not—let us forgive and forget, and cultivate that charity which covers a multitude of sins. Life is too short for estrangement and strife, for worldliness and lukewarmness in the service of Christ.

With the solemn memories of twenty years—memories of the dead and of the living; the scenes of joy and sorrow in which we have mingled; with an uncertain future with its fearful responsibilities, and the coming judgment with its eternal awards, we have no time for aught save the great work with which our Lord has honored us—and to this by His Spirit may He now incline us.

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